

**The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes.”**

**<sup>2</sup> So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. <sup>3</sup> Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you.”**

**<sup>4</sup> For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. <sup>5</sup> Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days. (NIV84)**

Theme: The Lord’s Genuine Love for us Sinners

Would you marry a prostitute? Would you marry someone knowing that he would be unfaithful and cheat against you time and time again? If your wife was sleeping around and then left you for another man, would you forgive her, take her back, and love her?

That is exactly what the prophet Hosea did. In chapter one God told him, **Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness.** Really God told Hosea to marry a prostitute. Gomer, his wife, would have three kids when she was with him. It seems as if the first belonged to Hosea but not the other two. Yet Hosea was told to take care of them as if they were his own.

But that wasn’t it. Apparently Gomer had left Hosea; she had been unfaithful, perhaps with many men. It seems as if she ran off with another man, someone that Hosea knew—a neighbor or even a friend. Hosea had married Gomer and loved her, but Gomer returned that love by leaving him for someone else.

It sounds like an episode on some smutty daytime talk show but it is the life that God chose for Hosea. Why? The Lord told him why right away in chapter one, **because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.** Hosea’s marriage was the ultimate object lesson for the people of Israel. As Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea so the people of Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord. They had turned away from God and toward the false gods of the

Canaanites. They failed to obey the Lord, but instead offered sacrifices and built shrines to idols. At times they would even sacrifice their children to these false gods or engage in ritual orgies in order to please them. Years earlier God told Moses that this was going to happen when he died, **You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them.** This pattern, the people of Israel followed again and again.

So God had one of his prophets marry a prostitute as a picture of God’s children. Gomer’s two children that didn’t belong to Hosea were also a picture for the people of Israel. God had Hosea name them, “Not Loved” and “Not My People.” God wanted to show the nation of Israel through Hosea’s messy family life how serious their unfaithfulness really was and how the Lord was about to reject them and cut them off from his grace.

But Hosea’s family isn’t just a picture of Israel and their unfaithfulness; it is also a picture of us. We aren’t Hosea in this illustration, but Gomer. A common picture drawn in the Bible is that of Christ being a groom and his Church, that is believers, being the bride. The Lord loves you; he chose you to be his own. Through faith in him we are united with the Lord like a bride is united to a groom. And so he expects us to remain faithful to him. He expects us to love him above all things, to listen to him, to obey him, to serve him, worship him, and so on. He doesn’t want our minds to wander toward something else; he wants to be first in every part of our lives. He wants us to trust him and believe in him.

We are filled with disgust at Gomer, and rightfully so. But if we are honest with ourselves, then we must admit that we are often like an unfaithful bride. We often love ourselves, family, money, and other things of this world more than we love the Lord. We often fail to listen, serve, and obey him. We would rather do other things than worship him or read his Word. Our minds wander away from him. The things of this world catch our attention and our desire and lead us away from him. Instead of finding peace and contentment, or happiness in the Lord, our groom, we turn to a whole host of other things. We fail to trust in him to take care of us, or to save us—relying

on our own power and strength. Like Gomer being unfaithful to Hosea, there are many times when we have been unfaithful to the Lord.

No doubt most of the Israelites got the point of Hosea's family life. But many of them did not care. They failed to return to the Lord and remain faithful to him. So God allowed foreign countries to infiltrate their lands, destroy their cities and take them away to exile. Everything that God had blessed them with, everything that they used to worship false gods, and everything that they had abused would be taken from them.

By using Gomer as an object lesson, the Lord is showing us how he looks at each and every sin—each time we are unfaithful to him it is like his spouse sleeping with someone else. It hurts God greatly. When a spouse cheats he will often try to cover it up, hoping to get away with it. But the Lord knows all things—he knows all your thoughts, words, and actions. You can't hide your unfaithfulness from him. You can't take it back; you can't make up for it. Why would the Lord want you or love you?

Why would Hosea want or love Gomer after she was unfaithful to him and left him for another man? Yet, in our text for today we see God commanding Hosea to take her back. **Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress.** Not only did Hosea take his unfaithful wife back, but he also loved her!

So Hosea went and paid 15 pieces of silver and about 10 bushels of barley for her—this was roughly equal to the price of a slave. So he paid a good amount of money to take his unfaithful wife back. He brought her back to his home to live with her and love her.

In the same way the Lord would welcome back his children. While the Israelites were in exile in Babylon they realized their sin. They would return the Lord, repenting of their sins and turning to him for forgiveness. They trembled before the Lord because of their sins and yet, they knew that the Lord is good and in his goodness he would forgive them. As the Lord said in verse four, **Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.**

And the Lord did forgive them. He brought them back to the Promised Land. He blessed them and helped them rebuild their cities and his temple. He was with them, took care of them, and loved them as a groom loves his bride.

Hosea lived around 750 B.C. By this time, David had been dead for over 250 years. So when God said that the Israelites would return and **seek David their king**, he can't possibly be talking about King David. Rather he is talking about King David's greater son, Jesus Christ. The Israelites looked forward to the fulfillment of the promised Savior. They believed that the Messiah would come and save them from their sins. They were sorry for their sins, trembling in fear, and yet they believed in the fulfillment of the promise that a Savior would come and make their scarlet hands as white as snow. We are like the Israelites. But instead of looking forward to the promised Savior, we look back at Christ who fulfilled that promise. He is the Messiah; he is our Savior. We tremble before him because of our unfaithfulness, yet we look to him and his goodness for forgiveness.

Hosea's love for Gomer isn't just a picture of the Lord's love for the children of Israel, but also of the Lord's love for us. All of us were ones who were lost; we were the ones who had gone astray. As Hosea paid a price to get Gomer back despite her unfaithfulness, the Lord also paid a price for us. But he didn't just pay the equivalent of the price of a slave for us. No, he gave up his holy precious blood as he died on the cross. But he didn't just give up his life, he also suffered through an eternity of punishment; as he took our sins upon himself and was forsaken by his Father. And then he gave something up—his faithfulness, which gave to us so that we could be perfect and holy in the eyes of the Lord. Isaiah writes in chapter 53, **We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

That is how much our Lord loves us. God sent his son to die; Jesus gave up his life and suffered through hell—not for a people who loved him and was faithful to him; but for those who loved themselves and were unfaithful to him. Christ's love for his Church, his bride, is a selfless love—not thinking about himself, but his bride.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians, **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a**

**radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.** We were born as his enemies. We hated him and wanted nothing to do with him. Yet he brought us to faith through the waters of baptism; he made us his own and we became his bride. We were unfaithful to him, turning after other things, leaving him for the pleasures of this world. So, in love, the Lord forgives us time and time again, not holding our sins against us, but considering us holy and blameless because he paid for and suffered through the sins that we have committed against him!

Jesus once said at the house of Zacchaeus, **the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.** As we learned in our gospel for today, the Lord loves each and every one of us. He is deeply concerned about our eternal well-being. He seeks the straying and he rejoices when we return. And when we do he doesn't hold grudges, he doesn't hold it over our heads, and use our past actions against us. He simply welcomes us back, puts his arms around us, and continues to love us.

It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what sins you have committed, how many times you prostituted yourself out to the things of this world. It doesn't matter how long you've been away. The Lord calls to you, he wants you back. He won't hold those sins against you. He won't hold them over your head in order to manipulate you. Rather he seeks you out so he can forgive you and when he finds you he embraces you and he loves you with an unconditional and ever enduring love!

Would you marry a prostitute? Would you take your spouse back and love her after she was unfaithful to you and left you for someone else? God doesn't command us to do such things. But Hosea did as a picture of the Lord's love for us. Despite who we were and what we thought of him, he loved us enough to make us his bride. And when we went astray, he didn't kick us to the curb and look for someone else. He bought us with the price of his own blood. He welcomed us back time and time again and he continues to love us.

When Hosea took back Gomer he told her that she could no longer sleep around, but had to be faithful to him. The Israelites too were commanded by God to remain faithful. Christ's love for us leads us to be faithful—to love him, to obey him, to worship him, to trust in him for all things. But we won't always be faithful—we will stray and go

after something else. But the Lord never strays, he never leaves us or abandons us. When we are unfaithful he gently leads us back to him, he welcomes us with open arms, forgives us, and loves us. He will always be with us until he, the groom, returns on the Last Day, when he will take his bride, the Church to the eternal wedding feast. Amen.